

ANGLICAN CHURCH
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Looking on the Things of Others.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN ST. JAMES'S CATHEDRAL

AT THE OPENING OF THE SYNOD OF
THE DIOCESE OF TORONTO,

1884.

BY

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ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA
GENERAL SYNOD ARCHIVES

TO THE RIGHT REV.

Arthur,

LORD BISHOP OF TORONTO,

THIS SERMON,

PREACHED BY HIS LORDSHIP'S APPOINTMENT

AND NOW PUBLISHED AT HIS REQUEST

AND THAT OF THE SYNOD,

IS DEDICATED,

WITH SINCERE RESPECT.

LOOKING AT THE THINGS OF OTHERS.

A SERMON.

PHIL. ii., 4—“*Look not every man on his own things; but every man also on the things of others.*”

Men have in all ages been disposed to dwell upon the peculiar difficulties of the times in which their lot is cast, and doubtless every age has its own special trials, discouragements, and dangers. History never repeats itself to the letter. When, however, we look below the surface of things, we speedily discover that, whilst the differences between one age and another are, for the most part, superficial, the resemblances are deep and fundamental. The forms of good and evil are continually changing; but the essential principles of good and evil are always the same. There is no good but that which is rooted in love and matured in sacrifice; there is no evil which has not selfishness for its first principle and beginning.

From the days of the Apostles, from the very birthday of the Christian Church, to the moment which is now passing, there never has been a time when the exhortation of the text was unneeded; and there never

can be a time when the spirit which is here inculcated will be otherwise than blessed and full of blessing. Under whatever light we study the subject, whether we follow the guidance of Holy Scripture, or that of the enlightened conscience, or the teaching of history, we shall come to the same conclusion. From all eternity love has been the principle of holiness, for God, the Holy One, *is love*; and ever since moral evil has invaded the universe, selfishness has been its source and its element.

Hence the universal application of the text—to every relation of human life and to every state of human society, whether in the commonwealth or the Church. And certainly it would be difficult to find, in the whole compass of Holy Scripture, words more applicable to the solemn occasion on which we are now assembled—the meeting of the Synod of this Diocese, where the members of the Church, Clergy and Laity alike, are met together under the presidency of their Chief Pastor, to take counsel for the best interests of the Church, and for the more perfect fulfilment of the work entrusted to her by God for the enlightenment, the regeneration, and the salvation of mankind. May the blessed Spirit of God, whose aid we should never fail to invoke, be present with us now and throughout our deliberations. What in us is “dark, may He illuminate, what is low, raise and support,” so that in all our works begun, continued, and ended, we may glorify God’s holy Name.

I. Now, in approaching this subject, we are met at once by an apparent difficulty—there would appear to be what we might call another side to the duty which

is here enforced. In other words, there is a true and important sense in which each one is bound to look on his own things before he can look on the things of others, a sense which is indeed implied in the use of the word "also," in the second half of the verse. Yes, we must all admit, and even insist, that it is our first duty, to God and to man, to consider our own position, relations, responsibilities, and the duties which the ^l may seem to prescribe. It will not suffice to meet our responsibilities if we can plead that we have given heed to the vineyards of others, while our own vineyards we have not kept. If it be a duty to bear one another's burdens, yet in another sense every one must bear his own burden. There is no precept which has a prior claim upon us than that which bids us know and do our own work in the world: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." And we may be well assured that we have not rightly understood the mind of Christ if we imagine that we can ever benefit His Church, edify His people, glorify His Name by neglecting the special work which He has given us to perform.

II. But here, as ever, good and evil lie side by side, and we extract venom from the honeyed blossoms of grace. We pervert that which is good, until it may indeed preserve its outward semblance, but its inward beauty and excellence are gone. Such is the blight that has fallen upon the nature of man that we can hardly work out a principle, however good, without its getting degraded and distorted. Yea, sometimes, after a period, "one good custom" may "corrupt the world."

So it is here. We begin, it may be, with a deep and living sense of the work which God has given us to do, and of the solemn responsibility which is connected with it. "This one thing" we feel that we must do. We are fired by a holy zeal. We are overpowered by a holy fear lest we should be found unfaithful. We work our work with joy, but also with fear and trembling. But alas, the root evil of our nature, that original sin of self-will, twines itself around all the fibres of our spiritual life; and instead of subordinating all our thoughts and feelings and purposes to the love of God and man, to the great ends of the Church, we too often make a god of our own thoughts, preferences, and plans. And so subtle and deceptive is this self-idolatry that men sometimes are able to convince themselves that they are toiling simply and disinterestedly in the work of God, for the extension and confirmation of the Church, and for the good of human souls, when they are in fact labouring for their own glory, or to give effect to their own personal wishes, which they have succeeded in identifying with the highest interests of the Church of Christ.

It would appear that some such spirit of self-will and self-assertion, had manifested itself in the Church at Philippi, before S. Paul wrote this letter. These Philippians were very dear to the Apostle, and they were lovingly loyal and devoted to him. There were many circumstances which tended to cement the affectionate friendship which existed between them. They were the first Europeans to whom S. Paul had delivered the Gospel message, and they never forgot what

they owed to him, nor the lessons which he had taught them. They never questioned his apostolical authority. No Judaizing tendencies had appeared at Philippi, like those which caused the Apostle such anxiety in the Church of Galatia. No schisms had broken out like that which rent the Church of Corinth. More than all these things they had sent to the Apostle's relief. The whole letter bears testimony to the affectionate relationship in which S. Paul stood to this Church. None of all his epistles is written in a strain of more tender affection. He gave thanks at every remembrance of them; he felt confident that the good work which had been begun in them, would be carried on to perfection. But there was one drawback to the general feeling of satisfaction with which he regarded them. A spirit of contention, of rivalry, had sprung up amongst them. Over and over again he cautions them against these tendencies, and exhorts them to cultivate an opposite temper. He bids them to "be of one mind," to do nothing "through party spirit or vain glory," to "esteem others better than themselves," to "have the mind which was in Christ Jesus." Two ladies he actually mentions by name, and beseeches to come to an agreement, to "be of the same mind." The spirit of self might be expected of Gentiles who knew not God. They might well "seek their own, and not the things that are Jesus Christ's;" but this was not becoming in the disciples of Christ. "Let this mind be in you," he says, "which was also in Christ Jesus," a loving, lowly mind, shewing itself in self-sacrifice. Such was the mind of Christ, such should be the mind of Christians. 'Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.'

And we know that this spirit has marked the faithful followers of Christ from the beginning. "Behold," says S. Peter, "we have forsaken all," or, as it is according to another reading, "we have forsaken our own, and followed Thee." And this is the true idea of the life of grace. To cling to all that we have as our own, to have no thought except for our own interests, aye even though those interests be eternal, is to abide in death. Where this spirit enters in, whether to the individual or to the community, it works as a poison in the constitution of which it has gained possession, producing manifold forms of disease, until by the power of grace and of God it is cast out again. It is when the spirit of love, which is the Spirit of God, works mightily in us, bidding us forget and deny ourselves, and serve one another, submitting ourselves one to another in the fear of the Lord, it is then that God is in the midst of us, working in us and by us, stirring us up to do his work, and blessing our humble endeavours to glorify his Name.

III. The general statement of these principles will hardly excite opposition even among those who are not deeply taught by the Spirit of Christ; and every well informed Christian must be aware that they cannot be gainsaid without a distinct contradiction of the evangelical law of life. It is when we set these principles over against the evils which they condemn, that we become conscious of the resistance which is practically offered to ideas and rules which are theoretically accepted.

And this is what S. Paul is doing in this passage. He is not merely asserting general truths, and such as

have an application, more or less, to all men everywhere. His teaching has reference to distinct evils which he specifies, and which he wishes to see eradicated from the Christian community in Philippi, and it is not merely for the inculcation of good in general, but for the destruction of these particular evils, that he commends to the Philippians the noble and Christian spirit of unselfish love.

Look at the verse which precedes the text: "Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Here is the wrong spirit and the right; and the evil was to be corrected, and the good to be substituted, by the unselfish care for the things of others.

So it was then, and so it is in all ages of the Church—the great hindrances to united, earnest, loving, successful action are what are here called "strife and vain-glory." The word *strife* is, in the revised version, rendered "faction," and there is no doubt that this is the true meaning of the word. The Apostle, therefore admonishes the Philippians to do nothing through personal vanity or party spirit.

Can we believe, my brethren, that this admonition is unneeded in the present age of the Church of Christ? On the contrary, we may be sure that there is no age of the Church in which it will not be needed. It was not so in the first age, as we learn from many places in the New Testament. It will not be so in the last age, for then, we are told, "men shall be lovers of their own selves." Indeed, we may well fear that, if we were to take away from any age of the Church all the work

which is done from personal vanity and from party spirit, we should be surprised to find how imperfect were the motives of many even of those who were animated by the love of God, and by a concern for the best interests of men.

Let us, for a moment, glance at these two motives in succession.

1. *Vain-glory, personal vanity.* Is it possible, we ask, that men who have sought redemption through the blood of Christ, and have found acceptance with the Father through Him, should sink so low as to draw the inspiration for their work from such sources as these? At least S. Paul seems to have thought it was possible, since he cautions men against faction and vain-glory as motives. And the history of the Church bears unquestionable testimony to the existence of the spirit of personal vanity in her members. What was the real character of the first great sin which startled the conscience of the Christian Church, and which brought down a punishment so terrible upon its perpetrators? What was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, but ostentation, vain-glory, personal vanity? It was not avarice. Doubtless they had feelings of avarice, or they would not have been withheld from doing what they were pretending to do, they would have given up the whole sum for which they had sold their property. But avarice was not the prompting motive of their conduct. They were under no obligation to give up their property to the Church. S. Peter told them that they were not required to sell it; and that, after it was sold, the money was still in their own power to use as they thought best. The root sin of their action, the sin

which led them to lie to the Holy Ghost, the sin which was so swiftly and so terribly punished, was fundamentally the sin of vain-glory, of personal vanity.

Nor was this sin one of those which passed away with the early childhood of the Church. Long after that first breach in the household of faith, when S. Peter and S. Paul had borne their last testimony to Christ, S. John declares that the same evil spirit was a serious obstacle to his work. "I wrote unto the Church;" he says, "but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us not." There can be no question as to the significance of words like these, nor of the nature of the spirit by which the Apostle was opposed.

Shall we venture, then, to think that this spirit is now extinct, so that it has no place among ourselves? If we could entertain such a thought, it might well raise a fear lest we had been smitten with that blindness which is the consequence of being made the bond-slaves of sin. Men could be unconscious of such an evil only because they were possessed by it. To what extent it prevails among ourselves God only knows. We dare not judge our neighbours, and our judgements of ourselves are apt to be partial and untrustworthy. Let us endeavour to deal faithfully with ourselves, and let us pray for grace to enable us to know ourselves more perfectly. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from my secret faults." At least, let us be well assured that such a spirit can have no blessing from God; and let us seek that better spirit, which looks not on its own things alone, but also on the things of others, which does nothing through vain-

glory, but in lowliness of mind esteems others better than itself.

2. The other form of evil which the Apostle here condemns, that of *faction* or *party spirit*, is even more dangerous, because it is more subtle and more plausible. Vain glory discloses its own deformity as soon as it is recognized; but party spirit claims for itself higher and nobler names, pleads for its own existence, as a necessity, applies to itself the epithets of zeal for God, loyalty to truth, fidelity to the Church, and thus by its union of subtlety and audacity seems qualified to deceive almost the very elect.

Indeed it must be allowed that at its first beginning the organization of party has much to say for itself. We can easily understand that good men should associate themselves together, in order to expose error, to propagate that which they regard as the truth, to give effect to convictions and to fulfil duties which they have no right to set aside or to neglect. Without such combinations it is to be feared that abuses would seldom be corrected, or reforms, however necessary, be brought about. All this must be freely admitted, and the world and the Church will alike bear witness to the benefit which has been derived from such combinations.

But no thoughtful observer can have failed to perceive the immense danger which is attendant upon such organizations, even when conceived, as they are not always, in the spirit of truth and charity. Zeal for truth is beautiful and godlike; but how easily does it degenerate into an idolatry of our own opinions. It must be confessed that a pure and simple love for

truth and goodness, by themselves, is a very rare possession; and it would be difficult to think of any vicious habit of mind which is not engendered or confirmed by the spirit of party, which too often and too soon takes the place of the love of truth. The partisan cannot be a sincere and ardent lover of truth, for he is either in terror lest his own favourite theories should be overthrown, or his prejudices have so blinded him that he is incapable of entertaining the supposition that others may possibly be right, and himself wrong. The same spirit makes men harsh and unjust in their judgments of each other; ready indeed to excuse every enormity in their friends, while unable to see any good in their antagonists. Hence come narrowness, bitterness, and unscrupulousness, an utter disregard for the feelings, the preferences, the interests of others, whenever they seem in the least to interfere with the ends of the partisan and his confederates. Such a spirit is hideous and detestable both in Church and in State; but it is never so offensive as when it shows itself in the family of God, among those whom Jesus Christ has commanded to love one another as He had loved them.

IV. I do not forget, in thus speaking, that a plea has been put forward for party and for party spirit on the ground that it stirs men up to mutual emulation, by which a greater activity is promoted in the work of the Church. Much, we are told, is done by reason of our divisions, which would be left undone, if they did not exist.

We cannot deny this. Must we, however, regard it as a matter of unmingled congratulation? Is it not rather one of the saddest things in the history of the Church, that the Gospel is sometimes preached

of contention, when it would not be preached of good-will? In such a case we may indeed rejoice that the Gospel is preached, but we shall have little of the spirit of Christ if we rejoice in the rivalries and contentions which have prompted the preaching of it.

It is said that the great fire of London put a stop to the ravages of the plague. Should we therefore be justified in setting fire to a great city, and destroying an incalculable amount of life and property, on the chance of checking a disease? There can be no doubt that great good has resulted from many wars, and that countries are seldom great or heroic where the martial spirit has entirely died out. Yet who will doubt that war is a fearful evil? Who does not believe that a ruler or a nation which gives occasion for a great war, has incurred a tremendous responsibility?

But, my brethren, there is an aspect of the subject which is, if possible, more serious even than the danger of doing evil that good may come. There is a danger of doing this evil without any good coming. It is true that the energies of men are often awakened by the emulation which comes from party spirit but of what kind are the energies which are thus awakened? Are they such as flow from the pure spirit of Christ? Are they not rather the actings of a zeal which is too often unloving, of a zeal with which selfishness and worldliness are all too largely blended? And will these passions of men, think you, work the righteousness of God? They may promote activity, but not true Christian life and power. They propagate a certain kind of religion, but it is a religion without humility or love,

and therefore it is a religion without Christ. And so it comes to pass that a great deal of our religious life and religious work shrivels and perishes, instead of growing, and spreading, and bearing fruit.

The evil which results in all ways from the divisions of the Church is immense and incalculable. We see it in the mission field in which the heathen refuse to receive the Gospel from men who profess to serve the same Master, and yet refuse to hold communion with one another. But we need not go so far from home. Apart from the lowering effect which this spirit has upon the religion which it propagates we see that it divides and weakens the energies of every denomination in which it finds a place. No impartial observer can doubt that one great cause of the lamentable weakness of the Church in Canada is to be found in our unhappy divisions. Instead of all working together for the good of the Church and the glory of God, men distrust each other, and suspect each other; so that among members of the same Church some are found pulling down what others are building up, some are raising what others have been destroying. Can we believe that these things would be so if we remembered the injunction of the Apostle, if we looked every one not on his own things, but every one also on the things of others?

There is certainly one consideration which should have the greatest weight with us in deciding our view of the subject before us. Which is the Christ-like spirit? Which is the one that He would approve? In which of these spirits shall we live so as to be like unto Him? Can we imagine the Son of God courting

popularity, forming parties for the promotion of any narrow or personal ends? Can we imagine Him for one moment looking on His own things, and not on the things of others? The notion is almost blasphemous; and yet, my brethren, this is the test to which the Christian is bound to bring all his thoughts and words, and ways. If it be true that He "pleased not Himself;" then we ought not to please ourselves, but our neighbours to their edification. If it be true that He "came down from heaven not to do His own will, but the will of the Father who sent Him," then we must thus understand our calling of God; for He left us an example that we should follow in His steps.

And how nobly has His example been imitated and His spirit illustrated by many who have received His truth, and pre-eminently by the great Missionary upon whose words we have been meditating! St. Paul was a man possessed of all the elements of character which would go to the making of a great party leader, if he could only have prostituted them for such a purpose. In him we have united a commanding intellect, a steadfast purpose, a winning affectionateness which had a wonderful power of drawing men's hearts and minds to himself. To what ends did he make use of those powers? Certainly not for purposes of faction or vain glory. There were party leaders who gloried in their making a fair show in the flesh; but "God forbid," says St. Paul, "that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." There were some who were bent on gaining adherents for themselves; but as for him this was his motto: "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." And when in spite of all his efforts, parties were formed, and his

own name was chosen as the badge of one of them, he reprobated the proceeding with horror, asking with a sacred indignation: "Was Paul crucified for you? were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" No, my brethren, such a spirit was impossible to this great Apostle. To him to live was Christ. He had been crucified with Him, and had risen again; and the life which he now lived was the life of faith, of love, of lowly self-sacrifice; in short, that of Christ who lived in him. And it is thus, and thus alone, that we in our measure may understand his words, and make them a power in our life, so that we can each look not on our own things, but also on the things of others.

Much might be said on the application of these truths to the Christian life, and to the present needs of the Church. But I will permit myself only a very brief reference to two points.

1. In regard to the appeal which is now made to you on behalf of the Missions of the Church. No one needs any proof of the necessity and importance of missions, or of the duty of the Church with respect to them. But most of us need to have our own duty with respect to missions impressed upon us more deeply. Can we believe that the mission work of the Church is being prosecuted in an adequate degree? And if it is not, can we acquit ourselves of blame in the matter? Why is it that there are none to enter through many a door that stands open for the work of the evangelist? Why is it that so many a work already undertaken is languishing for lack of the necessary support? We hear many answers given to these questions; but there is only one which is true and complete. Our zeal is so languid, because our love is so cold. If we did but

live nearer to the heart of Christ, and become more thoroughly pervaded by His love, then we should so look upon the things of others, that we could not bear to think that the work of the Gospel was left undone, or that those who were toiling in the mission field were deprived of the sympathy and support which they so greatly need, and which it is in our power to afford. Let us, this morning, remember God's goodness to ourselves, and the appeal which our blessed Lord bases upon it: "Freely ye have received: freely give."

2. And assuredly it is this same spirit of Christ-like, self-forgetting love that will bring a blessing into every department of the work of the Church, and not least into the deliberations of her assembled children. It may be said, without a moment's hesitation or doubt, that nothing has ever so marred the Councils and Synods of the Church, from their first assembling to the present day, as the tendency of men to look exclusively on their own things and not at all on the things of others. It is this selfish determination of men to have their own way, and not to think of what is best for the Church at large, that has made the best endeavours of the Church often prove abortive. God forbid that such a spirit should prevail or even exist in your assemblies. May this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. Let nothing be done through faction or vain-glory. Yea, may "the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus." Amen.

